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Founders of the Iowa Synod

Little did Martin Luther realize when he nailed the Ninety-five Theses on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, that he would be regarded by history as the founder of the Lutheran Church, which would some day be the largest Protestant body in the world. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 gave the Lutheran Church distinctive being and name. It set forth boldly the following three great "Reform Principles" of the New Testament faith, rediscovered by Luther: "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves"; the Bible is the only norm for faith and life, and contradictory human tradition is to be rejected; each person must come to God directly through faith in Christ, and needs no human mediators. All churchly usages which were out of harmony with this New Testament faith were rejected, as the Reformers sought to recapture for their own times the purity of the New Testament church.

The Lutheran Church today numbers about eighty million adherents. This represents about

one-half of the Protestants, and about one-eighth of the Christians of the world. The strength of Lutheranism lies in Germany, the Scandinavian lands, and the United States. In the United States and Canada there are about 8,500,000 Lutherans, making them fourth among Christian and third among Protestant groups in America.

Beginning in the late 1830's, a great wave of German immigration came to the United States and settled chiefly in the Middle West, between the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers. Many of these people were Lutheran. They needed pastors and teachers to shepherd them and to instruct their children in the faith.

In 1841 Rev. F. C. D. Wynecken, pastor at Fort Wayne, Indiana, went to Germany because of his health. While there he issued a stirring appeal in behalf of Lutheran settlers in the West.

Oh help us! Give us preachers to comfort us with the bread of life, to edify us by means of the Word of our Lord, to instruct our children in the saving knowledge of the truth in Jesus. . . . I pray you, for Christ's sake, begin the work; lend a hand; do it now! Do not lose time in needless deliberations. Hasten, hasten! It is a matter of saving immortal souls!

This stirring appeal reached Pastor William Loehe (1808-1872) of the little town of Neuen-dettelsau (near Nürnberg), Bavaria, and gripped his imagination. Although he never set foot on American soil, Pastor Loehe became the spiritual

father of the Iowa Synod. When he first visited the little village of Neuendettelsau as a student, Loehe remarked to a friend, "The town is so dead, I would not like to see my dog buried there!" After he had become pastor of this same parish, a great spiritual awakening took place, and before many years had passed the young churchman found himself working with a growing congregation, a missionary society, a missionary institute for the training of teachers and workers, and a deaconess motherhouse.

Having heard the call from America, Loehe felt obligated to help the scattered German colonists in the West. The first two "emergency helpers," Ernst and Burger, were sent out in 1842, trained to be parochial school teachers. Professor Winkler of the Theological Seminary of the Ohio Synod at Columbus met them in New York, persuaded them that preachers were more needed on the frontier than teachers, and took them with him to Columbus to finish their theological training. Thus began Loehe's Lutheran activity in America.

From this time a steady stream of teachers came over, men who finished their theological training in America, and became frontier preachers. About eighty of these men joined the Missouri Synod. Many more come to the Iowa Synod. Meanwhile a practical seminary had been opened at Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Loehe's greatest project for America was the

founding of colonies for poor immigrants. Three colonies, located near Saginaw, Michigan, were called *Frankenmut* (Franconian Courage), *Frankentrost* (Franconian Comfort), and *Frankenlust* (Franconian Joy). In connection with these a teachers' seminary and a hospice for immigrants were established in 1852.

Having begun this American venture, Pastor Loehe fostered it in every way. He produced devotional literature, catechisms and prayer books for the immigrants. He revised and edited a church service book, Loehe's *Agende*, and had it beautifully printed. He kept sending teachers and money. He published a special paper, *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und über Nord Amerika* (Church News from North America) with over 8,000 subscribers.

Although many of the Loehe men had joined the Missouri Synod (founded 1847), Pastor John Deindoerfer and Principal George Grossmann of the school at Saginaw soon found themselves in controversy with the neighboring Missouri Synod pastors concerning the doctrine of the church and the ministry. After personal conferences failed to bring peace, these men, together with about two dozen colonists, came to Iowa in September, 1853.

The move to Iowa took place under the leadership of three men, Gottlob Amman, the philanthropic founder of Frankenhilf, who was now almost destitute because he had been unable to col-

lect his monies; Principal George Grossmann of the teachers' seminary; and Pastor John Deindorfer of the Frankenhilf congregation. Caretaker J. Weege had to come later since he could not dispose of all the property at once. Among the colonists were two students, Karl Beckel and Christian Kranzlein; the rest who had come under Loehe's auspices decided to remain in Saginaw.

Most of the little colony came by steamer to Detroit, by train to Freeport, Illinois, which was then the end of the line, and by "snail-gear" stage to Dubuque. The Grossmann and Deindorfer families came in their own wagon, however, with a fine team of horses. Only when they were already well on their way did the colonists discover their lack of funds. Apparently each of the three leaders had thought that the other two had money enough to keep the party on the journey. Some of the baggage had to be left at Freeport for lack of funds. Arriving in Dubuque penniless, the colonists were received by two inns because they looked honest and had a team of valuable horses. The situation was relieved when Mr. Jesup cashed a draft on Loehe's bank for them.

Grossmann reported Dubuque was "quite correctly" called the "Key" to the whole West.

One marvels at the multitudes of settlers that come, even late in October, to go west through Dubuque. This includes not only those who have recently come from Germany, but many more who have lived for some time in

other states. The ferry which crosses the Mississippi constantly and makes the trip in 7 minutes, returns on the average with 2 or 3 pioneer wagons, so that it is often difficult for the new arrivals to find space in the hotels.

Deindoerfer remarked that there were many Germans in Iowa (at Davenport, Garnavillo, and Guttenberg) and at least 2,000 in Dubuque, of whom about 100 had joined Reformed and Methodist churches. Wages, he said, were good: one dollar a day for unskilled labor, two and a half to three dollars a day for skilled work. But the Germans needed a school and a Lutheran church. Obviously, Dubuque was the place to start!

The mighty army of peaceful invasion continued. The population of Iowa soared from 192,214 to 674,913 between 1850 and 1860. While the lumber industries of Dubuque were expanding to meet the housing needs of the settlers, and the foundries made plow shares to break virgin prairie, the fathers of the Iowa Synod were busy looking after the spiritual needs of 38,555 Germans living in Iowa by 1860.

On Luther's birthday, November 10, 1853, Grossmann once more began to teach eight students, six of whom had just come from Neuendetelsau. Thus the school begun at Saginaw was transferred to Dubuque, to grow into Wartburg Theological Seminary and Wartburg College (now at Waverly, Iowa). Begun as a school for the training of teachers, it soon became a full-

fledged theological seminary (1854). Presently St. John's Lutheran was founded in Dubuque.

Amman, Deindoerfer, and the rest moved on to Clayton County where a suitable tract of land four miles northwest of Strawberry Point was available at \$1.25 per acre. They named their settlement St. Sebald by the Spring, in honor of the missionary who had converted their ancestors in Germany. Amman moved into the first log house at St. Sebald in December, 1853. Soon Pastor Deindoerfer shared it with him, for they built a partition through the middle of the single room, and so converted the cabin into a two-family apartment.

That first winter was hard. Among the new colonists that came in 1854 was Pastor Sigmund Fritschel, who was to start a Latin school at Dubuque. He later became the president of Wartburg Seminary. That same year (in the unfinished parsonage at St. Sebald) the Iowa Synod was organized by Pastors Grossmann, Deindoerfer, S. Fritschel, and Candidate Schüller, who was ordained at this meeting. Grossmann became president and Fritschel secretary. No treasurer was needed.

The Iowa Synod adopted no formal constitution, but said that it would adhere to Scripture and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church as historically understood, and that it would look for an ever larger development of Lutheran faith and life. This showed the heritage of Loehe: Scriptural, Lutheran, irenic, willing to fight for the

truth, but unwilling to argue about nonessentials. The Synod emphasized parish schools and a period of careful training for church membership.

Such was the beginning of the Iowa Synod: four pastors, all young and inexperienced; two congregations (Dubuque and St. Sebald), both very poor; a seminary, begun with a few students but without property. Its one great asset was its eagerness to serve the German immigrants.

Students and colonists kept coming from abroad; pastors were ardent home missionaries. Soon three new congregations were organized: St. John's at St. Donatus, Iowa (1854); St. John's at Madison Wisconsin (1855); and Emanuel's at Cottage Grove, Wisconsin (1855).

The seminary served as the center of the synod's growth: in 1859 there were 25 pastors, 28 congregations, and many preaching places; in 1864 there were 42 pastors, professors, and missionaries, and more than 50 congregations distributed over seven states. The seminary had already graduated 21 pastors. In Iowa alone there were 16 pastors and about 30 congregations and preaching places. Other states served were Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, and the Dakota Territory where an Indian mission had been started at Deer Creek in what is now Wyoming. Clearly the Iowa Synod was growing lustily.

ALBERT A. JAGNOW